

August 25, 2009

To: All Development Services Customers

Subject: Changes in Building Division Procedures

In the past year, development activity has steeply declined as expressed in the amount of new dwelling units and square feet built. Application activity remains high as smaller remodel projects continue at a significant level. The loss of the new construction and of larger remodel projects has resulted in a decrease in total Building Division revenue generated and required us to substantially reduce the number of staff working in development as our staff is paid from the service fees you pay with your applications. Consequently, our staffing levels have reduced in many parts of our organization that affects our service to our customers.

Despite these reductions we are committed to deliver high quality and efficient services to our customers. We are accomplishing this commitment by focusing on our core businesses, streamlining our service delivery and on-going management of our personnel, time, and work flow. This way we can ensure that staff is operating at maximum efficiency and productivity in order to provide the highest quality of service per unit time to our customers.

The following are the changes we have instituted:

1. PERMIT CENTER

- a. ***Organizational Consolidation:*** All Permit Center services have been consolidated on the first floor to allow a one stop service delivery that includes building, planning, fire and public works services and minimize inefficiencies of supporting specialized staff required to serve two floors.
- b. ***Customer Triage:*** We are conducting more triage at the reception desk to identify the best service options for customers. When wait times are long for general inquiries, we are informing customers of on-line resources that can help the customers with self help for certain types of transactions.
- c. ***Improved Monitoring and Supervision:*** We have streamlined the supervision and monitoring of counter staff and oversight of transaction times, so that difficult and unusual cases which might otherwise require longer times are identified and culled from the mainstream for separate resolution. This effort is aimed at improving staff efficiency and reducing customer wait times.

- d. ***Walk-in Submittals:*** We have provided applicants with the flexibility to submit building permit applications and minor planning permit applications without appointments to allow applicants to submit earlier. Those without appointments (walk-in submittals) are served from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. and from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Notes:

- Submittals for special programs [such as Special Tenant Improvement (STI), Industrial Tool Installation (ITI), and coordinated plan review], express plan review, as well as major planning permits still require an appointment which can be scheduled between 7:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday by calling (408) 535-3555.
 - Permit Center Walk-in Wait Times:
 - (i) We are currently assisting all walk-in customers within 30 minutes, more than 70% of the time.
 - (ii) Occasionally, longer wait times of up to 1 to 1.5 hours to receive counter services may be experienced, especially at the traditional peak times of 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.
 - (iii) Longer wait times are generally experienced by walk-in customers with general inquiries.
- e. ***Phone System Changes:*** We are in the process of designing a new structure to our phone system to get faster response to callers seeking to speak to specific staff and are adding a look up feature to directly connect the caller to the staff. We are also changing the system to return calls that have been in the queue for certain set times to automatically forward to the call center operators for a message. The phones are staffed from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, to schedule inspections and appointments or for general inquiries. Information on self help will be provided while on hold such as scheduling inspections online.
- f. ***Planning Inquiries by Phone:*** Live phone service for Planning inquiries remains available from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday, and 10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Fridays.
- g. ***Self-Help:*** Customers can schedule their own inspections and pull simple permits on line without having to contact the Call Center staff by telephone or without having to travel to City Hall. By going to our web site at <http://www.sjpermits.org/permits/permits/> you can schedule your next inspection, obtain general information and building publications to assist you in finishing your project.

2. INSPECTION SERVICES

Due to the continued strong demand for inspections and the reduced staff capacity, we have instituted several changes to better balance the inspection demand and the reduced number of inspection slots available daily. Recently customers have been scheduling inspections more than a week in advance. We have experienced a sharp increase in cancellations during this same time resulting in building inspectors not having a full day's work load on certain days. This causes other customers to be denied an opportunity to get an inspection in a timely manner. As a result we are making the following changes:

- a. ***Inspection Scheduling:*** Inspections can be scheduled only within 5 business days in advance rather than the previous 2 weeks.

- b. **Inspection Cancellations:** Scheduled inspections that are cancelled after 2:00 p.m. two days prior to the scheduled date will be charged for the time the inspection was scheduled rather than the past one-day cancellation policy.
- c. **Note:** We have a reduced inspection capacity on Fridays because of alternating furlough days for our inspectors. Please avoid scheduling inspections on Fridays. Be respectful of counterparts in the construction industry and please schedule **inspections only when you are certain that you will be ready for the inspection.**

3. PLAN REVIEW SERVICES

a. **STI, ITI and Coordinated Review:**

- Tentative appointments will be accepted but must be confirmed via e-mail the following business day.
- Cancellations less than 2 business days of the scheduled appointment date will be billed for the amount of time allotted multiplied by the number of staff involved.
- No shows will be billed in the same manner as in above.

b. **Sub-Trade Plan Review Services:** There will be no sub-trade (plumbing, mechanical and electrical) express, STI, ITI and coordinated plan review every Friday due to scheduled furlough for inspectors who provide these services.

c. **Delay in Plan Review Services:** As we working through the large number of projects that were mid-process when the staff reduction occurred, please expect temporary plan review delay on all projects (particularly large projects) due to the necessity of re-assigning the work left by laid-off staff. We expect that things will settle down in about two months.

d. **Tips for Customers:**

- Provide good sets of drawings - hire competent design teams.
- Make an appointment with your Plan Examiner rather than just walking in.
- Contact your plan examiner if written plan check comments/directions are not clear (do not assume) or to explain/clarify the situation/intention.
- Submit/resubmit complete sets of plans rather than partial submittals (e.g., resubmit drawings containing full response to plan check comments).
- Check the Building Division web site to schedule inspections and research questions before you call or walk in.
- Please avoid scheduling inspections on Fridays.



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